UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1997/32 (Part II)
E/ICEF/1997/12 (Part II)
10 June 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1997
Geneva, 30 June-25 July 1997

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND ON THE WORK OF ITS SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF 1997

(18 and 19 March 1997)*

* The present document is a mimeographed version of the report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on its second regular session (18 and 19 March 1997). The reports on the first regular session (20-24 January 1997), the annual session (2-6 June 1997) and the third regular session (9-12 September 1997) are issued as parts I, III and IV, respectively. These reports will be combined and issued in final form as Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 12 (E/1997/32/Rev.1-E/ICEF/1997/12/Rev.1).

97-15746 (E) 260697

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I. ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

A. Opening statements

1. The President opened the session and welcomed delegations. The Executive Director spoke of recent successes and continuing challenges concerning the situation of children worldwide. These included Switzerland's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which brought to 190 the number of States Parties. The recent Amsterdam Conference on Child Labour, hosted by the Government of the Netherlands and organized in close collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), had called for a new ILO instrument on the most hazardous exploitative forms of labour to be drafted in consultation with relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A related development was the agreement signed in February between the sporting goods industry and ILO, Save the Children and UNICEF to eliminate child labour in Pakistan's soccer ball industry.

2. The Executive Director also reported briefly about UNICEF activities in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where the situation, particularly in Eastern Zaire, continued to deteriorate. In the past few months, UNICEF emergency interventions had been focused on ensuring protection and care of the most vulnerable children, including tracing and reunification of unaccompanied children; provision of primary health care services and of safe water, sanitation and hygiene education, particularly in the camps for refugees and displaced people; monitoring children's nutritional status and supporting therapeutic feeding; and provision of emergency supplies. UNICEF had carried out those activities in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and a number of partner NGOs.

3. Referring to the issue of the UNICEF headquarters financial management system, which would be the subject of an informal consultation during the session, she said it was her firm belief that investing in a new financial system would contribute to containment of programme support and administrative costs and ultimately improve programme delivery. After a very careful review, the secretariat had found that the United Nations Integrated Management Information System (UNIMIS) could not meet the needs of UNICEF for a number of reasons. It would not allow UNICEF to have a unified financial system, and would require separate systems for the Greeting Card and related Operations (GCO) and Supply Division. Using an outside vendor would save UNICEF about $9 million. However, the secretariat understood fully the need to collaborate with its United Nations colleagues to the greatest extent possible and had chosen to be part of UNIMIS for human resources and payroll, at a cost of more than $3 million. The decision-making process would be open and transparent, and based on the need to use resources as efficiently as possible.

B. Adoption of the agenda

4. The agenda of the session, as contained in document E/ICEF/1997/8 and Corr.1, was adopted as orally amended. The agenda contained the following items:

Item 1: Opening of the session: statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director

Item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda and timetable and organization of work

Item 3: Elections

(a) Executive Board representatives to the UNICEF/World Health Organization (WHO) Joint Committee on Health Policy (JCHP) (to become the WHO/UNICEF/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Coordinating Committee on Health (CCH)) for the 1997-1998 biennium

(b) Executive Board representatives to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/UNICEF Joint Committee on Education (JCE) for the 1997-1998 biennium

Item 4: Mid-term reviews (MTRs) and major evaluations of country programmes

Item 5: Report of the Executive Director: Annual report to the Economic and Social Council

Item 6: Oral report on the Management Excellence Programme (MEP)

Item 7: 1997 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award

Item 8: Other matters

Item 9: Closing of the session

5. In accordance with rule 50.2 and the annex of the Rules of Procedure, the Secretary of the Executive Board announced that 48 observer delegations had submitted credentials for the session. In addition, four United Nations bodies, one specialized agency and six NGOs had submitted credentials.

II. DELIBERATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

A. Election of Executive Board representatives to the joint committees for the 1997-1998 biennium

6. The President said that in accordance with decision 1994/R.2/5 (E/ICEF/1994/13/Rev.1), the Executive Board elects five members to JCE and to the JCHP, in addition to the President of the Board, who is an ex officio member. The five members are elected in their personal capacity and represent the five regional groups. Five alternate members are also elected in their personal capacity from the same country as the members. The members and their alternates nominated by States should be senior persons with relevant professional and UNICEF Board expertise and experience, able to provide technical guidance and policy advice to the concerned organizations. Representatives may not serve for more than two consecutive terms unless they become ex officio members.

7. She added that in accordance with decision 1997/8 (E/ICEF/1997/12 (Part I)), adopted at the first regular session in January, and a decision of the WHO Executive Board, UNFPA was to become a member of the new CCH. JCHP would hold its final meeting later in the year. UNFPA would participate in the concluding meeting of JCHP and in the discussion of the role and mandate of CCH. (See chapter III, decision 1997/13 for the text of the decision adopted by the Executive Board, including the names of the members elected to the two committees.)

B. Mid-term reviews and major evaluations of country programmes

General discussion

8. The Director of Programme Division and the Director of the Evaluation, Policy and Planning (EPP) Division each spoke briefly about general issues covered in the regional reports on MTRs and evaluations (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.11-E/ICEF/1997/P/L.16). The Director, EPP said that the UNICEF strategy to strengthen the quality and relevance of evaluative work included staff training, recognizing good evaluation practice, broadening the range of methodologies and providing support to the regional and country levels. The promotion of a "pro-evaluation culture" was an important contribution to strengthened oversight and accountability, improved programme performance and organizational learning and strategic planning. The Executive Director underlined her commitment to this endeavour, which would require an organization-wide effort.

9. Delegations expressed appreciation for the wealth of information in the regional reports and welcomed the candour and honesty in acknowledging problems encountered. One delegation said that initial programme objectives appeared to have been overly ambitious in some cases. Delegations strongly underlined the importance of evaluations and MTRs to ensure that implementation is on track and to improve the impact and efficiency of programmes. Some speakers said they wished to see more country programme evaluations from a wider range of country contexts; the two presented this year were from emergency countries.

10. Many delegations remarked on the diversity of format and requested a more standardized presentation in future. Several suggested using the format of the report for the Eastern and Southern Africa region, and possibly including additional material in future, in the form of a comparative table with selected

indicators, or a synoptic overview. It was also suggested that reports on MTRs and country programme evaluations include more information on the utilization of funds. The lack of data on costs made it difficult to form judgements about cost-effectiveness or efficiency. Other speakers said that shortfalls in supplementary funds contributions suggested that targets for supplementary funding should be more realistic, given the current climate of resource constraints. The importance for sustainability of adequate funding and of strategies to strengthen local institutional capacity was also emphasized.

11. Although the lessons learned were of considerable interest, it was pointed out that they were often phrased in very general terms, and that more analysis of causes and possible remedial action was needed. Reporting should focus not only on the achievements but also on the constraints, which were not always well covered. Delegations also expressed interest in learning about what was not successful, about reasons for deviations in implementation and corrective measures taken. One delegation asked the secretariat to look more closely into the aggregation of the findings from evaluations so as to have a clearer picture of programme performance. In this respect, several speakers said that more systematic reporting on results was needed, particularly in relation to objectives pursued. Delegations mentioned the need for more specific details about the contribution of UNICEF, showing the connection between UNICEF inputs and outcomes. Most comments seemed to focus on the achievement of sustainable results, which implied a collective effort in partnership with government and other actors, making it difficult to attribute causality to the specific inputs of any single agency.

12. Several delegations pointed to the limited references to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the goals of the World Summit for Children, the 20/20 Initiative, the situation analysis, country strategy note or the national programme of action, and asked how far these important initiatives and instruments had influenced programming. The importance of United Nations coordination was mentioned, as was the formulation of common monitoring and evaluation guidelines by the Joint Consultative Group on Policy.

13. Several delegations said that evaluations and MTRs pinpointed shortcomings and problems that were already known in such areas as community participation and social mobilization, coordination, planning and decentralization. They asked how UNICEF could ensure that lessons were really learned and that knowledge gained from evaluations was widely accessible and utilized elsewhere in the organization, to avoid continued recurrence of the problems. Another delegation underlined the need for UNICEF and its partners to capitalize fully on the wealth of experience and learning from the large volume of evaluations and studies conducted each year, and encouraged wide access to and utilization of the evaluation database.

14. Several delegations commented on evaluation methodologies, encouraging the wider use of participatory methods involving programme beneficiaries, including children. This would be likely to build a broader consensus around the evaluation recommendations, thus facilitating their implementation. Another speaker said that qualitative techniques were important, especially in programme areas that did not lend themselves to the more familiar quantitative techniques.

15. Many delegations raised questions about evaluation procedures and practices, asking about the roles and responsibilities for evaluation at headquarters, regional and country levels and if offices were complying with evaluation requirements. The secretariat said that New York headquarters was responsible for issuing global guidelines and synthesizing lessons learned;

regional offices were responsible for assisting country offices in drawing up integrated monitoring and evaluation plans; and country offices were responsible for developing and implementing those plans.

16. It was also asked if all country programmes and emergency programmes were subject to an MTR, how evaluation quality could be maintained and improved and how MTRs and evaluations would be used in the current context of organizational change. A speaker said that answers to some of the questions were expected in the report on management excellence to be presented to the Board at the third regular session in September, which would cover oversight, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. The same delegation suggested that an informal briefing session might be necessary.

17. With regard to content, several delegations mentioned that few evaluations dealt with issues related to child rights, such as sexual exploitation of children. Many evaluations covered service delivery, but more attention was needed to capacity-building, advocacy and social mobilization. Regarding community participation, a delegation said that there had been little mention of children's participation in the programming process.

18. Overall, delegations said that the MTR process had brought together information about new initiatives, achievements and constraints, insights into what was working and what was not, as well as analysis of management issues, evolving strategies and fund-raising difficulties. One delegation said that the MTRs had been helpful in assessing performance and better defining the lines of authority. The lessons learned section was the most useful part of each document. Future documents should reflect the balance between needs and rights, and how the gaps between them would be addressed.

19. Several delegations said that UNICEF had in several instances overstated the impact of its own assistance. Very often, UNICEF was working with a range of partners in a particular sector, all of whom could take credit for achievements. Documents should contain a more analytical assessment of the involvement of government, bilateral and multilateral agencies. There should also be mention of the steps taken to improve coordination in the programmes being reported on. As far as education was concerned, several extraneous factors (lack of buildings, distance, availability of teachers) had an impact on programme achievements but were outside the manageable interest of the programme.

20. One delegation suggested that there should be a more systematic method of reporting on programme achievements. MTR documents should compare results achieved with original objectives. There was also a need to explain more clearly how the problems that had been identified would be remedied. More information should be given on changes in programme structure and processes to be carried out as a result of the MTRs. It was also suggested that the MTR document present clearer information on the use of funds and more cost/benefit analysis.

21. The Director of Programme Division re-emphasized the secretariat's strong commitment to make UNICEF more of a learning organization, in order to ensure maximum relevance and impact of country programmes. The Director, EPP provided figures suggesting that the trend of evaluation work was to give more attention to rights, protection and the other strategies that had been flagged for more emphasis. She also gave examples of the involvement of children in evaluation activities. Regarding channels for dissemination of lessons, she mentioned the

evaluation database of 6,000 studies and evaluations, various publications, the UNICEF site on the World Wide Web and reporting to global and regional meetings.

Africa

22. The Executive Board had before it reports for Eastern and Southern Africa (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.11) and West and Central Africa (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.12), which were introduced by the respective Regional Directors.

23. Several delegations expressed satisfaction with the MTR from Kenya. The general opinion was that the Kenya MTR had been sensitive but had increased the manageability of the programme. One speaker said there was a need to balance service delivery and advocacy in the country programme. Another asked about the impact of the reduction in the number of intervention zones from 18 to 6 and whether such reductions would affect the needs and rights of the children in areas no longer covered by UNICEF programmes. The speaker asked if other donors would be invited to cover the areas that UNICEF was no longer covering.

24. One delegation stated that in Botswana, the shift from antenatal care to the improved management of obstetrical emergencies was rational and positive, and that HIV/AIDS initiatives should be continued. The speaker also asked whether the merger of health and nutrition activities in Botswana was a refocusing of activities or simply a repackaging.

25. Several delegations commented on the MTR for Mozambique, in which their local representatives had participated. They said that the role of the Government in the programme should have been assessed more critically and that more emphasis should have been placed on analysing capacity-building and social mobilization. One delegation suggested that there might be problems of coordination and integration of UNICEF health programmes in the Government's health plans. The speaker expressed the hope that such questions would be solved at field level. It was also stated that the MTR process should be used to determine the division of labour for the remainder of the programming period. One delegation described the report as too descriptive; the lack of analysis meant that it was difficult to judge the achievements of the programme. Several delegations also questioned the positive findings of the MTR report. One delegation said that the MTR for Mozambique should also have included an analysis of programme feasibility in relation to reconstruction and rehabilitation.

26. With regard to the Congo evaluation, one delegation requested clarification of the statement that "... strong involvement of external agencies could undermine the sustainability of the health reform ..." in paragraph 40.

27. One delegation asked UNICEF to provide an analysis of the logistics and essential drugs components of the Bamako Initiative. Another suggested that the Initiative was making a positive contribution and should be expanded. The secretariat said that the Bamako Initiative had been successful in solving problems of drug supply, and had gone a long way to strengthening capacity in logistics and procurement systems. The processes involved in promoting the Initiative were complex and involved many partners. In several instances, low utilization rates at health centres had to do with distance and the existence of alternatives to primary health care. Health centres were obliged to maintain user fees to cover operating costs, and to ensure the quality of drugs and treatment.

28. To a suggestion that higher priority should be given to sanitation and sanitation education, the secretariat said that improvements in sanitation were challenging. Prototype latrines were being developed, but did not always lead to reduced costs, a major consideration in determining their acceptability.

29. With regard to the Benin MTR, one delegation requested clarification of the reasons for the low utilization of health centres. Another expressed concern that the report did not raise the issue of progress towards the objective of government responsibility for vaccine procurement by the year 2000.

30. Concerning the evaluation of the Nigeria country programme, a speaker questioned the conclusions contained in paragraph 51 of the report, saying that the use of educational materials should not be dismissed since such materials were often a means of reinforcing what had been learned from other sources. The speaker underlined the success of the Bamako Initiative in spite of a difficult environment and said that the whole issue of sustainability was crucial.

31. One delegation suggested that the report on the Chad evaluation should have given details of the measures to be used to correct the problems that had been identified. More detail was needed on the specific conclusions of the evaluation and how these were being incorporated into programme redesign. The delegation asked whether successful experiences in community participation were being fed into national policy. The Regional Director for West and Central Africa said it was important to note that the country had been through 30 years of conflict, that the accessibility of different regions was constantly changing and that political and economic changes were unpredictable. At this stage in the programming cycle, the country office was trying to establish broad guidelines for the new country programme, rather than focusing on details. The feasibility analysis mentioned in the report would enable programme managers to test the objectives and structures of the current programme against the findings of the evaluation.

32. A delegation expressed appreciation for the monitoring of structural adjustment carried out by UNICEF in Zimbabwe, and another expressed interest in Mauritania's experience in promoting community-level participation. The West and Central Africa region faced many difficulties and was experiencing several ongoing complex emergencies, according to a speaker, who appreciated the progress being made by programmes in the region. A delegation said that its Government was collaborating with UNICEF on water and sanitation programmes in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, a fact not mentioned in any of the MTR reports. Another speaker suggested greater focus on urban problems.

33. The representative of Rwanda expressed his Government's disagreement with the figures describing the number of Rwandan refugees in Zaire used by the Regional Director for West and Central Africa in her oral presentation of the MTR report. He said that there were no longer any Rwandan refugees in Zaire following the massive voluntary return in November 1996. Only the former Rwandan armed forces, the militias and their families remained. Among them were innocent children. He thanked the Executive Director for the assistance provided by UNICEF to care for them and help them to return to Rwanda. They were being cared for at Goma.

34. Both Regional Directors said that specific issues raised would be addressed on a bilateral basis.

Americas and the Caribbean

35. The Executive Board had before it a regional report for the Americas and the Caribbean (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.13), which was introduced by the Regional Director.

36. Several delegations said that the report was too general, insufficiently analytical and lacking specific information on programme achievements and constraints. Speakers also asked how the results of the MTRs and evaluations had influenced the relevant country programmes and what changes had been introduced either at the strategy or policy level. A delegation referred to the evolving functions of headquarters and regional office locations and asked the Regional Director to comment on how she perceived the relationship and division of labour between both locations in the field of evaluations and MTRs. The Regional Director said that efforts would be made to improve the quality of future reports on MTRs and evaluations and referred to efforts under way to improve monitoring and evaluation capacities in the region.

37. Several delegations, while recognizing page limitations in a document of this type, indicated concern that country specificities were not evident in the summary of the multi-island MTR. A speaker said that while a stronger UNICEF presence in Suriname should be considered, the basis for this presence was not evident from the report. Some delegations asked for specific details on how the 20/20 concept, which was mentioned in the report, was being applied in the multi-island programme. The Regional Director replied that while the report for the multi-island programme MTR did not highlight country specificities, they had indeed been considered at the MTR and the new multi-country programme strategy attempted to deal with the differences between the countries by grouping countries around common problems and trends. Suriname was now included as part of the multi-country programme, which was a step towards securing a stronger UNICEF presence in that country.

38. Referring to the Haiti MTR and country programme evaluation, a delegation noted the good record of work with NGOs and emphasized the importance of strengthening the institutional capacity of the Government as part of the transition from emergency to a more regular type of programme. It was asked if increased attention would be given to such problems as HIV/AIDS, adolescent pregnancies and street children. A delegation requested information on the likelihood of increased supplementary funding for immunization in Haiti. Another said that the report on the Haiti evaluation was not analytical enough and the lessons learned were not apparent. The Regional Director replied that the Haiti office had been more successful in obtaining funds for education but was negotiating for funds for the expanded programme on immunization.

39. Referring to the evaluation of programmes to control iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) in Bolivia, a delegation indicated the importance of improved coordination with donors in the field and the need to improve government ownership of programmes. The Regional Director said that a United Nations mission on best practices which had just visited Bolivia had identified UNICEF as one of the agencies that was doing the most to improve coordination with donors and the Government. However, efforts to improve coordination would continue.

40. Several delegations endorsed the findings of the evaluation of the Central American water and sanitation programme, particularly on the importance of hygiene education and sanitation and of community participation, including cost-recovery as a predictor of sustainability. A delegation said there were good

models of community-based water and sanitation programmes in the Dominican Republic, which might be of interest to programme managers. Another referred to the strategic nature of this subregional programme, especially in view of cholera epidemics which crossed national barriers.

41. Referring to the evaluation of programmes for children in especially difficult circumstances in Brazil, a speaker asked if any concrete steps had been taken on the recommendation to end child labour for children under 14 years through the provision of economic subsidies. The representative of Brazil outlined actions being undertaken by the Government and other partners to end child labour in that country. A delegation asked how innovative approaches and best practices such as the one referred to on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ecuador would be shared and incorporated into UNICEF strategic planning, programming and advocacy. Another delegation said that UNICEF had done a good job in the field of child rights legislation in Guatemala and endorsed the role of UNICEF as a technical adviser, not executor. This was deemed especially appropriate in the case of Peru, where the office was perceived as understaffed.

42. Concerning the Colombia MTR, various delegations asked if the extension of the country programme would have financial implications. The Regional Director replied that there would be no additional cost due to slow implementation in the first year of the country programme. Several speakers referred to paragraph 3 of the report and asked for further details on the types of adjustments that had been made to the country programme management plan. A delegation said that the information provided on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was not specific and another asked what was meant by the reference to UNICEF as a "catalyst for change". The Regional Director said that this concept was related to the facilitator role played by UNICEF in bringing groups together from the governmental, non-governmental and private sectors to examine child-related concerns. She acknowledged the need to do more to share best practices and referred to a CD-ROM database of evaluations sent by headquarters as a useful example.

Asia

43. The Executive Board had before it reports for East Asia and the Pacific (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.14), introduced by the Regional Director, and for South Asia (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.15), introduced by the Deputy Regional Director.

44. Some delegations said that future reports should have an improved format, be more analytical and identify obstacles to, and opportunities for, the UNICEF contribution. A speaker specifically asked for more information on the important area of collaboration with NGOs. Another requested information on the methodologies used and offered to share her agency's experience with different evaluation methodologies. The speaker encouraged monitoring and follow-up of programmes, with the results linked to the situation analysis and future programme development. She suggested publication of the results, particularly in fact sheets, and sharing them with partners, including donors. She also suggested that the evaluation results be submitted to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. The same speaker expressed disappointment at the slow overall progress with salt iodization, but said she was pleased with the progress made in the related projects supported by her Government. She also encouraged UNICEF to support and promote the activities of local governments and NGOs concerning child protection.

45. Referring to the Philippines MTR, a speaker said that having local reviews prior to the national review probably gave UNICEF inputs a high profile locally, and served to make them more effective. The process provided was example for other countries in the region. Another delegation said that UNICEF had supported the Philippine Government's decentralization process and focused on the issue of child labour and child prostitution. The importance of strengthening local capacity for effective collaboration with other partners in the Philippines was emphasized by another speaker. Successful private sector fund-raising in the Philippines and Thailand set an example for other regions.

46. Commenting on the evaluation of education in Cambodia, one delegation said that the experience gained in home-based early childhood development should be shared in the region. Another speaker suggested wider dissemination of the experiences gained in achieving the mid-decade goals and in the implementation of the project on community health financing in China.

47. A delegation questioned the wisdom of the young career development project in Thailand and asked what UNICEF would do to ensure that girls involved did not become victims of big city life, or fall prey to other ills associated with sex tourism. The Regional Director said that the institutions involved were five star hotels that did not entertain prostitution. While the project provided very good opportunities for a few young girls, UNICEF would continue to develop more long-term and sustainable programmes for this target group. Another speaker supported the reallocation of funds previously used to support basic health services for support to children in need of special protection measures and for the HIV/AIDS programme in Thailand. The speaker praised UNICEF collaboration with NGOs and other United Nations agencies and support for education for at-risk youth.

48. Several speakers expressed concern over the emergency situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A delegation suggested that transparency in UNICEF relief efforts would elicit further international support for that country. Another asked about UNICEF involvement and objectives in the current assessment mission to the country. The Regional Director said that a resident UNICEF project officer was monitoring the emergency relief operations and participating in the assessment mission. UNICEF was prepared to join the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in a third emergency appeal.

49. A delegation welcomed UNICEF support to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for vaccines, oral rehydration salts and iodized salt, but asked about the cost-effectiveness of providing video cassette recorders and television sets to rural schools, given the unreliability of electricity supplies and possible weakness of maintenance services. The speaker asked if UNICEF should not identify some external sources of textbooks, to guarantee the appropriate content, rather than providing paper for book production. The Regional Director made a commitment to continue to shift from providing hardware towards focusing on software. However, because some rural schools were in very isolated areas, providing supplies was necessary for the moment to ensure that the schools got some assistance.

50. Commenting on the South Asian regional report, a delegation said that many of its findings were in line with its own concerns, especially the recognition of the need for balance between efforts devoted to national immunization days and regular immunization activities. The speaker expressed concern that in Nepal, UNICEF had reduced funding of immunization activities too suddenly. Coverage levels had not been improving, and UNICEF should review its commitment to the programme and encourage other donors to fill the gap.

51. Saying that iodized salt was reaching 25 per cent of the population in the region, a speaker asked if this included areas of greatest need. The speaker agreed with the importance being attached to creating public awareness and demand, which was a critical element of any successful micronutrient programme. Quality assurance and rigorous monitoring, which the evaluations had highlighted, were essential for sustainability of IDD control programmes. A delegation supported the fact that UNICEF had recognized problems in meeting the salt iodization goal, with difficulties clearly analyzed and lessons being drawn.

52. A delegation said that the issues presented in the Deputy Regional Director's introduction were much clearer than the report itself, which was rather confusing, inconsistent, lacking objectivity and inconclusive. Another delegation, however, said that the report was of very high quality. The first speaker also expressed concern that the Maldives, which had done well in building capacity for delivery of social services, had not been able to attract supplementary funding, and asked donors to help mobilize more resources.

53. Regarding the evaluation of primary education, a delegation said that the findings of the evaluations in Nepal and Bangladesh were very similar, pointing to limited effectiveness of these programmes, including the basic primary education programme in Nepal. These findings supported the delegation's own feedback through its bilateral programmes, particularly about the question of female teachers.

54. A delegation expressed satisfaction with the changes and new approaches proposed for the Nepal country programme. However, recent information indicated that serious problems were being experienced in implementing the change from a sectoral to a thematic approach. The changes had created confusion with the Government and NGO partners, had affected the credibility of UNICEF and led to personnel changes. The speaker requested more information on the situation and asked whether UNICEF could not have handled these changes in a more tactical way.

55. The Regional Director for South Asia replied that over the past few years, it had become obvious that the Nepal programme had become fragmented and ineffective and would have to focus on a limited number of programmes. UNICEF had tried to innovate by clustering projects around themes and creating teams within the office to manage this approach. In the process of implementing the new approach, UNICEF had learned many things, both positive and negative. Above all, it was difficult for UNICEF to work in a thematic way when government and other partners worked sectorally. Consequently, when the country programme recommendation was presented, it proposed that only around 25 per cent of resources be allocated to the thematic approach. A lot of work had already gone into recreating a sectoral approach without losing some of the positive aspects of the thematic approach. It has also been realized that the Nepal office needed to be strengthened to ensure that UNICEF had the highest quality staffing possible. The regional office had become more directly involved in working with the Government of Nepal to ensure the conditions required for programme implementation.

Middle East and North Africa

56. The Executive Board had before it a regional report for the Middle East and North Africa (E/ICEF/1997/P/L.16), which was introduced by the Regional Director.

57. A speaker said that the progress made in Djibouti was reflected in the MTR, especially in the areas of decentralization and social mobilization and in the success of the gender equality project. The delegation endorsed the recommendations of the MTR that drew attention to the continued focus on health and education for girls. Another delegation expressed support for gender mainstreaming, and said that non-formal "alternative" education for girls was an important achievement worthy of consideration in other countries.

58. A delegation said that the Child-Friendly Village Initiative in the Sudan should be highlighted as a good example to be considered in other countries. Another speaker said that UNICEF should be vigilant so that all communities benefited from UNICEF-assisted projects, as guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that UNICEF should reconsider its support if there was evidence that any particular community was excluded. It was stated that the reference in paragraph 20 of the report to a project visit by representatives of the Canadian Government was inaccurate, as a representative of the Canadian Committee for UNICEF had taken part.

59. Referring to the evaluation of the girls' education project in Morocco, a delegation said the project was a good one, with positive results. It raised awareness of equal rights for girls, increased girls' enrolment significantly and had expanded from 5 to 17 provinces. The project was supported by several donors, which contributed to its success. Other delegations said that drop-out and retention rate figures should have been analysed and reported, as they needed to be considered in the future direction of the project. Another delegation stressed the importance of boosting girls' education throughout the region, as well as raising enrolment and reducing drop-out and repetition rates.

60. A delegation spoke about UNICEF assistance to Iraq in the aftermath of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Security Council resolution 986 (1995). The speaker said that UNICEF had reduced its activities, including immunization, because of insufficient funds, and was not paying attention to the needs expressed by the Ministry of Health. At the same time, UNICEF had a large contingent of staff and supporting facilities in Iraq, costing a lot of money. Even if supplies were processed in a timely manner under the resolution, it was insufficient compared to the needs of vulnerable children and women. However, there were delays by the Sanctions Committee in releasing the supply requests. The speaker asked for more attention to Iraq's children and for greater support from UNICEF. The Regional Director emphasized the importance given to Iraq's children and women by UNICEF and the need for basic staff and facilities to support implementation of resolution 986. He said he would convey the concerns to the UNICEF office.

Conclusion of discussion

61. The President announced that in accordance with decision 1995/8 (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1), adopted at the first regular session of 1995, the secretariat had taken note of the comments made during the discussion and would share them with the offices concerned.

C. Report of the Executive Director: annual report to the Economic and Social Council

62. The Executive Board had before it that part of the report of the Executive Director which also serves as the annual report to the Economic and Social Council (E/ICEF/1997/10 (Part I)). The report was introduced by the Director, United Nations Affairs and External Relations.

63. There was general agreement that the report was comprehensive and contained much useful information. However, a number of delegations said that it could have been more analytical and problem-oriented. Most agreed that the number of issues involved and the page limitations made more extensive reporting a challenge.

64. A number of delegations expressed concern over the decline in general resources and encouraged the Executive Director to accelerate fund-raising activities with non-governmental partners. A number of speakers also expressed appreciation for the increased level of resources allocated to Africa. The Executive Director described ongoing fund-raising efforts, including the positive working relationship with National Committees for UNICEF. In addition, she said that secretariat representatives met regularly with donor government officials in capitals.

65. Addressing the issue of common premises, speakers said there were positive benefits, particularly in the light of cost savings. The Executive Director said that UNICEF was committed to common premises as long as they were cost-effective, but cautioned against proceeding too quickly until a better management system was in place. There was a request for future status reports on the issue.

66. Several delegations commended the positive role played by field committees and thematic groups. There was support for further harmonization within the United Nations system in operational activities, including programme cycles, capacity-building, national execution and participation by NGOs. The secretariat reported on the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation within UNICEF.

67. Responding to a number of requests for the UNICEF view on the Secretary-General's "track one" initiative for United Nations reform, the secretariat said that the idea of the country framework came out of suggestions made in the Committee on Development Operations, of which UNICEF was a member. Other, more general steps towards reform reflected suggestions made by various parts of the United Nations system. The reform measures of UNICEF would be compatible with and/or part of the Secretary-General's reform package.

68. It was suggested that intersessional or informal meetings be held to discuss the 20/20 Initiative and the mobilization of new and innovative sources of funding.

69. See chapter III, decision 1997/11 for the text of the decision adopted by the Executive Board.

D. Management Excellence Programme

70. The Executive Board had before it a report on progress in the implementation of MEP (E/ICEF/1997/CRP.9 and Corr.1), which was introduced by

the Executive Director. She said that due to successful mainstreaming of management excellence to appropriate line managers, responses to decision 1996/32 (E/ICEF/1996/12/Rev.1) could also be found in a number of companion documents to be reviewed in conjunction with reports on management excellence.

71. Delegations expressed appreciation for progress achieved to date, as demonstrated in early reporting of efficiency gains, including the reorganization of the Regional Office for Europe in Geneva to serve as focal point for National Committees, cost savings from reorganization of functions and the growing use of e-mail. Responding to a request for information on the development of common services, the Executive Director said the secretariat was looking at possibilities for consolidation in locations where there is more than one UNICEF office.

72. The strengthening of the Office of Internal Audit (OIA) was welcomed by delegations. One speaker requested that findings from OIA visits to regional offices be included in future reports on management excellence. Another looked forward to receiving detailed information on the activities of OIA in the report on MEP to be submitted at the third regular session.

73. A number of speakers inquired about plans for the reconfiguration of GCO and results achieved to date, especially in relation to European and Latin American markets. The Executive Director said that informal discussions within GCO were moving in the direction of more focused card activities and key markets, but production would not be moved closer to markets.

74. Delegations expressed appreciation for the report's description of the UNICEF accountability system for the supply function, and one speaker requested more information on system-wide coordination of supply activities. A delegation made reference to the problems detected last year in Copenhagen during the course of an internal audit, asking what steps had been taken to rectify the situation and the lessons learned from the experience. The Executive Director said that the Danish authorities were continuing to investigate the matter, and she would report to the Board when she had any new information. A delegation expressed support for savings registered so far from the reorganization of supply cycle times and costs. Asked about steps taken to make more use of local resources, the Executive Director emphasized the need for UNICEF to develop further its own internal capacity in order to help build local capacities.

75. Some speakers expressed concern over the slow pace of management reform and lack of concrete results, but others said that progress had been made in defining roles and responsibilities, decentralization, savings, efficiencies and general improvements. A clear timetable outlining the achievement of management excellence goals was requested, as was information on problems encountered by the secretariat in implementing reforms. It was also stated that UNICEF reform efforts should be adjusted in response to the Secretary General's new initiatives.

76. Several delegations said that more detailed information was needed on roles and responsibilities at country, regional and headquarters offices, including budgetary and human resource implications and efficiency gains. The information was seen as essential to a more informed assessment of the 1998-1999 biennium budget. A speaker requested more information on country offices' coordination with other United Nations agencies. Another speaker said that accountabilities for governance should be defined for the Executive Board and secretariat, and offered to share national experiences of linking accountabilities to government and management structures.

77. A number of delegations expressed concern about staff morale in UNICEF and encouraged the continued strengthening of human resources management as a priority. A delegation welcomed the creation of a career management group within the Division of Human Resources, and another said that higher standards were needed in the UNICEF management culture to address problems of lack of clarity in work and transparency. The need to ensure a stable work environment and open dialogue between management and staff representatives was stressed. Information was requested on the process of redeployment of staff with permanent contracts. A few speakers said that management reform was demanding for staff and that staff insecurity was to be expected, so the human dimension should not be ignored. A delegation requested updates on how management excellence had affected staff in terms of numbers, working conditions and staff morale.

E. 1997 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award

78. The Executive Board had before it a report containing a recommendation by the Executive Director (E/ICEF/1997/9), endorsed by the Bureau, that the 1997 Maurice Pate Award be given to the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) of Namibia. Following the Board's approval of the recommendation, the representative of Namibia said that she was proud of the decision to present the Award to LAC because she had been involved in its formation prior to independence. LAC had helped people when they were persecuted or imprisoned by apartheid and was now helping Namibian society to cope with the legacy of apartheid.

79. The President said that the Award would be presented during the annual session in June. She added that it was important for the Board to promote the Award more widely next year and to have information about the Award disseminated as soon as possible so that countries could promote the candidacies of worthy organizations like LAC. (See chapter III, decision 1997/12 for the text of the decision adopted by the Executive Board.)

F. Other matters

Informal consultation on the UNICEF headquarters financial management system

80. During the session, the Executive Board and secretariat held an informal consultation to discuss the UNICEF headquarters financial management system. Prior to suspending the formal meeting for the consultation, the President reminded delegations that although it was the prerogative of the Executive Director to make the final decision on the issue and no decision by the Board was required, many delegations had requested the opportunity to discuss the very complex process and raise questions with the secretariat.

81. During the informal discussion, many delegations expressed support for the directions taken by the Executive Director, while others raised questions for further elaboration. One delegation specifically stated that IMIS should be the standard for the United Nations system as a whole and that all agencies with field operations, including UNICEF, should have the same integrated financial system. The speaker referred to reports issued by the Joint Inspection Unit, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Secretary-General in support of this opinion. The delegation regretted that in the context of United Nations reform, UNICEF had chosen to follow an "independent and unknown path".

82. The same delegation said there was no reason for members of the United Nations family to have different accounting or personnel management requirements, which would lead to different reporting systems, limit transparency and provide inconsistent information to Member States. The document submitted informally by the secretariat did not refer to maintenance costs, a very important point. Based on these points, it would have been possible to request an independent evaluation on the comparative advantages of IMIS and other systems, but this would have been too costly. The delegation therefore requested close monitoring of the financial system project, with regular updates and consultation, and review by the Board of Auditors and the Executive Board and that in future, the secretariat should coordinate all information technology activities to avoid duplication.

83. Another delegation congratulated UNICEF on its decision to acquire an internationally recognized financial management package and to enter into a sound business relationship with a highly regarded private sector service provider. That decision would ensure that the financial management capabilities of UNICEF kept pace with the latest international developments. The delegation noted the thoroughness of the UNICEF evaluation and selection process and expressed doubts as to the usefulness and adequacy of UNIMIS for the United Nations system as a whole. In particular, UNIMIS did not seem well suited to the complex needs of UNICEF, which included incorporating GCO and supporting the new Programme Manager System. The delegation hoped that a successful experience by UNICEF in this endeavour would serve as an example to other members of the United Nations system.

Executive Board programme of work

84. A number of delegations suggested that in future, it might not be necessary to have a regular session in March, and they requested that the Board consider this possibility when examining its programme of work for 1998.

85. A delegation suggested that at the annual session, the Board should consider the Secretary-General's report on improving internal oversight, as the General Assembly would be discussing the report in the fall. Another delegation said that the Board had discussed the draft report extensively at two sessions in 1996 in order to provide input to the final report. To discuss the report again would be a duplication of work.

Tribute to Hala Kittani

86. Both the Executive Director and the President paid tribute to Hala Kittani, Assistant Secretary of the Executive Board, who was leaving that position after 12 years to take up new responsibilities in the Office of United Nations Affairs and External Relations. The Executive Director said that during her tenure as Assistant Secretary, Mrs. Kittani had been closely involved in the management of relations between the Executive Board and the secretariat, an area to which she was especially suited because of her well-known linguistic and diplomatic skills.

G. Closing of the session

87. The Executive Director and President thanked delegations for their participation and the session was closed.

III. DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

1997/11. Annual report to the Economic and Social Council

The Executive Board

1. Takes note of the "Report of the Executive Director: Annual report to the Economic and Social Council" (E/ICEF/1997/10 (Part I)) and of document E/ICEF/1997/4 on "Follow-up to the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1996", which is on a related subject and was considered by the Board at its first regular session of 1997;

2. Decides to transmit the reports, together with the comments made at both sessions, to the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its 1997 substantive session.

Second regular session
18 March 1997

1997/12. 1997 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award

The Executive Board

1. Decides to present the 1997 UNICEF Maurice Pate Award to the Legal Assistance Centre of Namibia;

2. Approves an allocation of $25,000 from general resources for that purpose.

Second regular session
18 March 1997

1997/13. Election of Executive Board representatives to the joint committees for the 1997-1998 biennium

The Executive Board

1. Decides to elect the following members and alternates to the UNICEF/World Health Organization (WHO) Joint Committee on Health Policy (to be reconstituted as the WHO/UNICEF/United Nations Population Fund Coordinating Committee on Health) for the 1997-1998 biennium:

(a) From the African group of States, Dr. Patrick Yowasi Kadama as member and Mrs. Harriet Mugerwa as alternate (Uganda);

(b) From the Asian group of States, Dr. Ali J. Bin Mohammed Suleiman as member and Dr. Saleh M. Salim Al-Khussaiby as alternate (Oman);

(c) From the Eastern European group of States, Dr. Petr Struk as member and Dr. Jan Janda as alternate (Czech Republic);

(d) From the Western European and Others group of States, Dr. David Nabarro as member and Dr. Penelope Key as alternate (United Kingdom);

2. Decides to elect the following members and alternates to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/UNICEF Joint Committee on Education for the 1997-1998 biennium:

(a) From the Eastern European group of States, Professor Alexander S. Kondratjev as member and Dr. Galina S. Kovaleva as alternate (Russian Federation);

(b) From the Western European and Others group of States, Dr. François Remy as member and Mr. Jean-Pierre Regnier as alternate (France);

3. Agrees that the candidates to be proposed by the regional groups that have not yet submitted nominations to the joint committees will be considered elected upon receipt by the secretariat of a letter from the Chairman of the respective regional group confirming the nominations.

Second regular session
19 March 1997